The Sun.
BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

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ON CLIPPING WINGS: THE BOYG.

THE Boyg is a troll character in *Peer Gynt*. Readers who are old enough to have taken that work on faith at the hands of MANSFIELD will remember the Boyg as dark stage and a horrendous voice diffused through a megaphone. He can't very well be more definitely represented; the actor would need to be several times as bulky as Messrs. ARBUCKLE and built like a human doughnut into the bargain!

Envelopment and inertia were the tactics of the Boyg. He did nothing; neither could his victim, surrounded with his impenetrable rubbery toughness. The great Boyg's attentions amounted to life internment. Peer Gynt, after noisy despair, in the end prevailed, and the excuse of the Boyg is significant: "He was too strong—there were women behind him."

Incorrigible Ibsenologists have interpreted this monster as a symbol of nine-and-sixty different things. In our opinion, they go too far afield. Any young struggling writer can always put out his hand and touch the Boyg; IBSEN personally knew him all too well, and wrote *Peer Gynt* with hands raw and bleeding from battering against him. Roughly, the Boyg is the general market for a beginner's creations, and when the beginner, in our American cant phrase, is striving to "get in" he is actually striving to get out—out through this animate prison wall, to move among spirits receptive to his efforts.

The exasperating Boyg has virtues, after all. He is a potent developer and educator, as well as a test that only the fit survive.

Now consider this troll as he is—a circle of magazine editors and book publishers, including the professional manuscript readers of both. The magazine people are the more in point, since at them the beginner's efforts are usually directed. BRANDER MATTHEWS has lately called the magazines the halfway house between journalism and literature—an easygoing rhetorical fillip that has small meaning and less application; he might better have called them the halfway house between obscurity and substantial recognition.

Little Essay on "Commercialism"

The first thing our beginner should fix in his mind is a thing no beginner worth trying to help does fix there. A magazine is a commercial product, made on business lines and backed, as a rule, by business men, who naturally take a thoroughly businesslike view of it, and reasonably expect a return from their capital invested. Their editor must govern himself accordingly.

All that is undoubtedly bad and perverse in the light of superb ideals. Nevertheless it exists, and it will continue to exist until the millennium. Our beginner ought to recognize it and study how to cope with it, instead of souring his soul before it and kicking against the Boyg, who thrives on kickings. He'll have to recognize it sooner or later; the sooner the better for him.

But let us not make an ogre of this word commercialism—or if we must, let us measure our ogre and gird up our loins instead of running away. What does commercialism mean? It means that the primary aim is to sell as many copies as possible, and thus to have a circulation that will command the patronage of advertisers, on whom 99 per cent. of periodicals necessarily depend, not only for revenue but even for full self-support. And how are these copies to be sold? By publishing things in every issue that one or another numerous class of readers will want to see.

From one or two flagrant and at least temporarily prosperous examples we might conclude in our haste that just what is published is not of much moment, so long as plenty of "blurb" (a good natured term for lies) is smeared around it. But that is not quite correct. The glare of the blurbing may attract public attention in the first place; still all the blurbing a master blurber could reel off in a hashish delirium will not avail to hold the public *unless the magazine's wares somehow make good.* Their manner of making good may be wholly different from the representations, but you cannot get anybody to read, and keep on reading, anything that is unsatisfactory to him by yelling its praises at the top of your lungs. The simple soul who "knows what he likes" is not the joke he is painted. We all know what we like, and we will have it in a magazine, and if yours does not contain it our 20 cents will go down on the newsstand stack of some other editor's.

However, we, the reading public, are complex. There are several varieties among us, with several different likings. Otherwise one magazine alone in its glory would be the logical absurdity resulting in jig time. A good commercial editor—no, leave out the "commercial"—a good editor is he who selects and understands a definite and profitably numerous element of us, and slings his product right straight at our heads. A bad editor is he who tries to have his product all things to all men, and ends in having it nothing to any man; and an unsuccessful editor is the toploftical CYRANO DE BERGERAC who will make "no concession to the public taste"—which is a cultivated way of saying, the public be damned!

What Every Editor Knows.

Returning to our obscure, beginning author, fresh from college: His vague and disabling notion of it all, which his education has sedulously drilled into him, is that all the editors are public damners, or ought to be, and can take or leave his magnificent unbending originality. They can. They do!—and his manuscripts bounce back off the Boyg and hit him in the face. (This, to be sure, is assuming, as has been done in our series of papers on Wing-Clipping all along, that there is really something in the writer and his manuscripts, and that he is not merely one more predestined futile duffer, laboring under a tragical fixed idea that he can write.)

When the editors say they are always on the lookout for new and original talent they speak truly. They neglect, however, to add that they are bound to play it safe. The talent must not only be new and original, it must also be acceptable to the people who like the magazine; and only the Higher Omniscience and Prescience can be sure of this twofold condition before the experiment is tried. Therefore, if the unwritten rule is, "When in doubt, reject," why should we rail at those who are governed by it? Ludicrous rejections are certainly on record, and the rejectors have lived to be discomfited. What isn't on record, but is locked in the aching memory of many an editor is the fact that one false move with a new author, however independently meritorious he may be, will promptly freight the editor's mails with complaints from constant readers—who feel entitled to edit their favorite magazine themselves.

How To, and How Not To.

What's the answer? As we see it, something very much like this: either our beginner must make up his mind to play his end of the game as he finds it, and "get in" by writing, not imitations of things that have sold, but original things that will both be fun to write and fun for almost any one to read; or he must establish himself in a bread winning job which has nothing to do with his writing, and make up his mind to scribble away for his private pleasure and the satisfaction of his private ideals, and—collect rejection slips.

At all events, let him not take the common and disastrous middle course—sneering at the editors, sneering at the prosperous authors, and at the same time bombarding the Boyg's whole surface with ill considered stuff written in discouragement; until, having got to the point where he will have to sell or starve, he either surrenders abjectly and becomes a tenth rate potboiler and hack for the rest of his days (thus adding his own little carcass to the substance of the Boyg), or else gives it up altogether, after one last wild attempt to write a masterpiece and show 'em—writing in conditions that would paralyze the genius of a GOETHE, or prostrate the nervous system of a rhinoceros. There are too many of these tragi-comic middle coursers around. They drop in and bother us with their troubles when we want to work.

Boygs Always Were.

Where the non-collegian, self-equipped beginner has a certain pull over the Ph. B. is not, as is commonly supposed, in his having begun to "see life" at an early age. *Everybody* sees life enough to serve his writing purposes—even a SIMEON STYLITES on a pillar. Instead, it is in having gained practical experience of Boygs.

The Boyg can be beaten. He can be tamed and harnessed. But not by a novice with a handicap of conceit and of no-compromise academic notions. There have always been Boygs wherever there have been authors—Boygs not precisely like our present one, yet amounting to the same animile. We suspect some young Americans think of our Boyg as an exclusively American item of fauna, nourished on the almighty dollar. Young Englishmen or young Frenchmen could tell them better.

Summing up: It is the very eagerness of the people of the United States to produce, develop, encourage and acclaim Great Authors which, being misdirected, results in crippling writing youngsters before their inevitable struggle with the condition we have fancifully called the Boyg. Switching back to our title metaphor, that misdirection is the clipping of wings.

The Librarian's Corner

CONDUCTED BY
FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE.

CULTURE VIA CUT-INS.

ONE of the problems of the small town library bears a striking resemblance to the ancient riddle: "Which came first, the hen or the egg?" Stated in similar terms, the problem is: "Which do people want to do first, see the film or read the book?"

Any book—they're all in the films, or will be. They haven't translated *The Education of Henry Adams* into the celluloid yet, nor *The Four Horsemen*, but with a few such trifling exceptions they're all there. Nor are the exceptions merely those books that are not adapted to screen presentation; one has only to look over the lists of books that have been filmed to realize that the modern movie producer can photograph anything and get away with it.

It doesn't need a plot. Here is George Ade's *Fables in Slang*, for instance, on a list of films compiled in the New York Public Library, avowedly "to aid in giving the foreigner a panoramic view of American life, past and present, so that he may be encouraged to leave the slums of our cities for the villages and country, where his chances for making good are so much greater." Just how *Fables in Slang* is calculated to assist in this back to nature process, unless by way of illustrating how George Ade made good on his own "Brook Farm," is not quite clear. Still, if *Fables in Slang* or any other movie masterpiece will only encourage a few horny handed foreigners to try their luck in the laborless hinterland of the Hudson's headwaters, there is at least one farming writer or writing farmer at Rider's Mills, N. Y., who will rise up and call George Eastman blessed!

Mary Gave a Little Boost.

The only obstacle, apparently, in the way of filming any book at all is the price. Ever since Mary paid $40,000 for the screen rights of *Daddy Long-legs*, according to Ma Pickford, authors and publishers have been simply exorbitant in their demands; she even threatens to use nothing but original stories hereafter! Doubtless a wise Congress will some day amend the copyright laws so as to give the movie magnates a similar privilege to that enjoyed by the phonograph and player-piano people, who may lift any copyrighted musical composition on the mere payment of a stipulated royalty of two cents a roll or record.

It doesn't diminish the patronage of the library, this universal picturization (as the slang of the studios puts it) of all literature. On the contrary, the trail of every new film may be followed from town to town by the increased demand for the book from which the film was made. Mark Twain's biographer recently told the readers of *Books and the Book World* that the sale of Mr. Clemens's books was greater than ever. Librarians do not doubt that much of this is due to such films as *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. And more than one movie fan has gained new respect for the great American philosopher-humorist after learning, *from the screen*, that *Joan of Arc* is not a "funny" book.

As nearly as can be gathered from the limited statistical information available more persons enjoy the book-film combination if they take the book first and the picture afterward. As one young woman put it: "After you've seen it in the movies the pictures in the book just make you mad." One has to be of the cognoscenti to realize that there is no essential relation between the illustrations and the text!

Poor Philip Nolan.

But the difficulty the library faces is that of getting the news to the movie public that there are such things as books, which they will sooner or later see on the screen. "That must be a great picture—I hear somebody has written a book about it," is an actual comment overheard on *The Man Without a Country*. It is only when they see the pictures made from a book that most of them are made aware of the book's existence. Ensues a rush to the library; at least, here are some new minds being inducted into the reading habit. So much to the good. But how much more they would have enjoyed the film, how much more the book itself, if they had only had the book first!

Perhaps the schools may find a way to help solve this problem, and incidentally to make their own courses of reading more interesting. Even the possibility of some day seeing Booth himself in the title role didn't make *Hamlet* any more interesting in my own high school days, but put *Seventeen* in any eighth grade curriculum with the promise of seeing Jack Pickford acting it on the screen and see if that doesn't stimulate the taste for good literature among the pupils!